

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-03

CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 MCE-00 DODE-00 COME-00

TRSE-00 /056 W

-----030419 121203Z /53

R 120813Z JUN 78

FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4048

C O N F I D E N T I A L ACCRA 4739

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, MASS, GH

SUBJ: REVIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS

REFS: (A) STATE 141830 (B) STATE 045685 (C) DAO ACCRA

IR 6 835 0078 77 (DTG 051622Z AUG 77)

1. IN OUR VIEW, GHANA'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD, WHILE NOT PERFECT, DOES NOT BY ITSELF WARRANT DENIAL OF AN EXPORT LICENSE FOR 6300 HANDGUNS FOR THE ARMED FORCES (REF A). THE KEY JUDGMENT REQUIRED BY PARA. 6 REF (B) IS WHETHER GOG IS ENGAGED IN "SERIOUS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS." THOUGH THERE ARE SOME VIOLATIONS HERE (FOR EXAMPLE, AT LEAST 35 POLITICAL OPPONENTS WERE RECENTLY ARRESTED BY HEAD OF STATE ACHEAMPONG FOLLOWING A DISPUTED REFERENDUM), WE FEEL THAT ON BALANCE GHANA DESERVES A PASSING GRADE FOR ITS HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES. OUR REASONS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

2. THE MILITARY REGIME WHICH HAS BEEN IN POWER HERE SINCE 1972 HAS TRIED TO GOVERN WITH A LIGHT HAND. IT HAS AVOIDED TORTURE AND OTHER GROSS ABUSES OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THE COUNTRY'S TWO MAJOR NEWSPAPERS, AS WELL AS RADIO AND TV, ARE ADMITTEDLY CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT
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AND GENERALLY TOE THE PARTY LINE. ON THE OTHER HAND, SEVERAL SMALL INDEPENDENT PAPERS ARE PERMITTED TO PUBLISH CRITICISM OF THE REGIME. ACHEAMPONG IS SLOWLY MOVING GHANA TOWARDS CONSTITUTIONAL RULE BY MID-1979. WHILE MANY BELIEVE HE PLANS TO STAY IN POWER AS PRESIDENT OF THE NEW "UNION GOVERNMENT" WHICH IS TO BE INAUGURATED AT THAT TIME, HE IS AT LEAST PAYING

MORE ATTENTION TO DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND THE NEED FOR CIVILIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNMENT. SOME POLITICAL PRISONERS ARE NOW BEING RELEASED AND WE EXPECT THIS TO CONTINUE. WHILE CORRUPTION AND MISMANAGEMENT REMAIN PROBLEMS AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY, WE DO NOT THINK ACHEAMPONG AND HIS COLLEAGUES ARE REALLY TRYING TO DENY BASIC ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS TO THE PEOPLE OF GHANA. INDEED, AT THE TECHNOCRAT LEVEL THE GOVERNMENT IS MAKING VISIBLE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE LOT OF THE COMMON MAN. WE THINK THAT WHEN GHANA IS JUDGED EVEN BY HIGH WESTERN STANDARDS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, IT COMES OFF REASONABLY WELL; WHEN WEIGHED AGAINST SOME THIRD WORLD NATIONS, IT LOOKS VERY GOOD INDEED.

3. THE SALE OF HANDGUNS TO THIS GOVERNMENT SHOULD THUS IN OUR VIEW NOT BE HELD UP ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS ALONE. HOWEVER, WE WANT TO FLAG TWO IMPORTANT POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHICH SHOULD BE STUDIED BEFORE THIS TRANSACTION IS APPROVED:

(A) ACHEAMPONG'S NUMEROUS CRITICS, BOTH HERE AND ABROAD, MIGHT INTERPRET THE SALE AS OVERT MILITARY SUPPORT BY THE UNITED STATES FOR A GOVERNMENT THEY ARE CONVINCED IS INEPT, CORRUPT AND DICTATORIAL. THESE DISSIDENTS, WHO INCLUDE MANY LAWYERS, DOCTORS AND OTHER ARTICULATE MEMBERS OF GHANA'S ELITE, CONFIDENTIAL

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MIGHT ACCUSE THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION OF ARMING THE VERY SECURITY FORCES RESPONSIBLE FOR JAILING SOME OF THEIR COLLEAGUES.

(B) ACCORDING TO ONE REPORT LAST YEAR, SOURCED TO A SELF-STYLED GHANAIAN ARMS MERCHANT (REF C), THE GOG PLANS TO TURN OVER SOME OF ITS OBSOLETE HANDGUNS TO UNIDENTIFIED "AFRICAN FREEDOM FIGHTERS" ONCE NEW WEAPONS ARE OBTAINED. SHOULD SUCH A TRANSFER OCCUR AND BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, THE U.S. MIGHT CONCEIVABLY BE CHARGED WITH CLANDESTINELY SUPPORTING ONE FACTION OR ANOTHER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA OR ELSEWHERE.

4. OUR RECOMMENDATION IS THAT APPROVAL OF THE SALE BE HELD UP TEMPORARILY ON POLITICAL GROUNDS UNTIL WE CAN FIND OUT WHAT THE GHANAIAN ARMY PLANS TO DO WITH ITS PRESENT CROP OF HANDGUNS. IF THEY REALLY ARE EARMARKED FOR THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN THEATER, WE ASSUME THIS WOULD RAISE OTHER POLICY CONSIDERATIONS THAT THE DEPARTMENT WOULD WISH TO EXAMINE CAREFULLY. HOLMES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HUMAN RIGHTS, SMALL ARMS, MILITARY ASSISTANCE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ACCRA04739
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780244-1130
Format: TEL
From: ACCRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780672/aaaacjqa.tel
Line Count: 115
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c09fbf8b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 141830, 78 STATE 45685
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2401290
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REVIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS
TAGS: SHUM, MASS, GH
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c09fbf8b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014